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Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Results Report

**ACDI/VOCA Liberia
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	Antenatal Care
BCC	Behavior Change Communication
CDMC	Community Disaster Management Committee
CHC	Community Health Committee
CDHC	Community Health Development Committee
CHV	Community Health Volunteers
C-IMCI	Community Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
CMAM	Community Management of Acute Malnutrition
DMU	Disaster Management Unit
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ENA	Essential Nutrition Actions
FDP	Food Distribution Point
FEW	Field Extension Worker
FFP	Food for Peace
FMC	Food Management Committees
FY	Fiscal Year
GoL	Government of Liberia
GCHV	Government Community Health Volunteers
gCHV	general Community Health Volunteers
GMP	Growth Monitoring and Promotion
JSI	John Snow, Inc.
LAUNCH	Liberian Agricultural Upgrading Nutritional and Child Health
LOA	Life of Award
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCI	Making Cents International
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHSW	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MYAP	Multi Year Assistance Program
PCI	Project Concern International
PHH	Post Harvest Handling
PLW	Pregnant and Lactating Women
PM2A	Preventing Malnutrition in Children Under two Approach
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
QIVC	Quality Improvement Verification Checklist
RBHS	Rebuilding Basic Health Services/Funded by USAID
RVA	Rapid Vulnerability Assessment
SO	Strategic Objective
SBC	Social Behavioral Change
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
TTM	Traditionally Trained Midwives
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. INTRODUCTION: LIBERIA AGRICULTURE UPGRADING NUTRITION & CHILD HEALTH RESULTS

This report represents the annual activities implemented for the fiscal year 2012 by ACDI/VOCA and its sub-grantees, Project Concern International (PCI), John Snow Inc. (JSI) and Making Cents International (MCI), through the Liberian Agricultural Upgrading Nutrition and Child Health (LAUNCH) program. LAUNCH achieved positive results during the second year of program implementation by focusing on scaling up activities under the three Strategic Objectives (SOs), developing and strengthening the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system through the creation of databases and field tested monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools and improving the efficiency and performance of the commodity management system using mobile phone registration. Major emphasis was placed on delivering quality training to beneficiaries while providing LAUNCH staff with needed technical assistance through the ACDI/VOCA volunteer program and other technical assistance provided through supervisory visits from headquarters and paid consultancies.

In line with its block farm approach, the LAUNCH program continued to recruit additional farmer groups in its geographic area of intervention and to provide technical support and guidance to established farmer groups. In an effort to ensure close supervision of farm activities and timely technical assistance, the LAUNCH program deployed field agents to the most remote areas of Nimba County to live within the farmers' communities. This proximity is expected to improve the interaction with the farmers and the program's quality.

Under the health and nutrition (SO2) component, the LAUNCH team focused on improving the quality of interventions started in the first year of the program and on introducing new sub-components such as water and sanitation including expanding the number of Care groups and improving the supervision of activities under SO2 by redefining the role of health coordinators. There are currently 133 active Care groups in the LAUNCH program reaching approximately 9,000 pregnant and lactating women and children.

Under the education component (SO3), the team continued working with all 32 target primary schools by providing management support to school principals, training teachers on topics such as the preparation of lesson plans and guiding local PTAs on their roles and responsibilities.

The program team also worked on reorganizing the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities in an effort to increase impact. Sustained advocacy by different national and international stakeholders has finally resulted in the formulation of the National Disaster Management Unit to oversee disaster related activities in the country.

The program also continued coordination with the Government of Liberia (GoL) at multiple levels (national, county, and district) and a good rapport has been established with the main line ministries (Agriculture, Health and Social Services, Commerce and Industry, Education and Public Works). The LAUNCH team participated in coordination meetings in Monrovia and in the field to update the government on its activities. LAUNCH also provided the Food Security Coordination Unit with updated quarterly and annual reports.

The program continues to enjoy the support of the Government of Liberia. The LAUNCH program successfully monetized the 2012 commodities with minimal challenges. The government is very appreciative of the LAUNCH monetization activities and provides the LAUNCH management a forum and opportunities to openly discuss any challenges that may arise. Funding for the program was secured as planned for activities implemented in 2012.

A) STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASED AVAILABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO FOOD OF VULNERABLE RURAL POPULATION

a) IR 1.1: Improved Smallholder Production

For the FY 2012 rainy season, the LAUNCH program recruited, trained and provided technical assistance to 3,231 farmers (1,698 males and 1,533 females), representing 130 farmer groups in Bong and Nimba counties. This represents approximately 144% of the targeted farmer groups' original target (90) in 2012. This year, the LAUNCH team made an effort to scale-up farmer group recruitment to make up for the 2011 target shortages. To date the LAUNCH team recruited a total of 166 farmer groups, representing 46% of the life of activity (LOA) target (360 farmer groups). The LAUNCH program expects to reach its LOA targets by 2014 with the assistance of 12 additional field extension agents recruited in 2012 as part of the LAUNCH ramp up strategy.

Table 1: Farmer Groups Supported by the LAUNCH Program during FY 2012

County	No. of Districts	No. of Farmer Groups	Total Farmer Group-Members	Male	Female
Bong	2	46	863	443	420
Nimba	4	84	2,368	1,255	1,113
Total:	6	130	3,231	1,698	1,533

The selection of farming communities participating in the program was based on a number of criteria, including communities that are vulnerable and marginalized, lack access to markets and essential services, such as safe drinking water, health facilities, schools and roads. Further, community selection criteria included the willingness of community leaders and farmers to cooperate with LAUNCH, the availability of land for farming and demonstration plots; the willingness of farmers to join other farmers in the market linkages and value chain training, farmers' willingness to work in block farms and learn and adopt new farming practices.

Results from the annual survey indicate that LAUNCH farmers are learning best agronomic practices imparted to them by the program and they are applying these practices in their fields. As a result, 38% of the surveyed farmers are using at least 3 recommended sustainable agronomic technologies promoted by the program. This represents 95% of the 2012 target (40%). Additionally, in FY 2012, LAUNCH farmers have farmed 366 additional hectares of land using improved management practices. While this figure represents only 53% of the FY 2012 target, it is worth mentioning that LAUNCH focus group discussions with farmers have revealed constraints such as the lack of adequate tools and equipment to clear land in addition to the lack of reliable and affordable post harvest handling structures and market outlets, which are major hindrances to farmers increasing the size of cultivated areas. LAUNCH, therefore, has made post harvest handling an important focus for the remaining years of implementation and has enlisted the expertise of a US-based volunteer to assist in the design of locally adapted structures that will assist farmers to improve post harvest techniques in their communities.

In recruiting the 2012 farmer groups, LAUNCH has incorporated important lessons from its first year of implementation into the agricultural extension strategy. Lessons learned include: 1) communities along main roads are often less appreciative of the kits provision and the technical assistance provided by the LAUNCH program, and as a result they do not tend to value assistance brought to them by the program- LAUNCH extensionists therefore now recruit communities that are located off the main roads; 2) while the LAUNCH management encourages the overlap of SO activities in a given community, agricultural extensionists are encouraged to geographically spread their interventions so that more communities are reached; and 3) results from the annual survey revealed that households participating in at least two of LAUNCH's SOs are faring better on the hunger scale than those participating in only one SO. The LAUNCH team is therefore putting in place a strategy to ensure approximately 78% overlap across SOs.

The LAUNCH program team has refocused its crop diversification strategy on the three value chain crops (corn/vegetables, cassava and rice) identified in the approved IPTT. Therefore, for FY 2013, 80% of LAUNCH's targeted farmer groups will be farming rice, cassava or corn/vegetables – ACDI/VOCA plans to propose the inclusion of vegetables in the Year 4 PREP IPTT submission for FFP consideration.

IR 1.1.1: Improved Farm Management Practices Adopted

LAUNCH's farmer training program is field-based and includes sequential topics that take farmers through production best practices in storage and marketing techniques. In an effort to harmonize approaches and ensure standardized programming, LAUNCH extension agents train newly recruited farmers in topics including: field layout, nursery preparation and management, line planting, construction of mounds and ridges, timely transplanting, timely weeding and mulching. To date, 3,231 farmers have benefitted from LAUNCH's farm management practices training in 2012 representing 95% of the FY 2012 target. While 47% of the participants in these trainings were women, this percentage represents only 79% of the targeted women. LAUNCH hopes its new gender integration strategy will encourage more women to attend training sessions.

Additionally, the LAUNCH program team established 124 demonstration plots (136% of the FY 2012 target) for the purpose of on-field farm training to encourage the adoption of these new techniques. Further, as farmers participating in the block farms have their own individual farms, LAUNCH expects the knowledge imparted at the block farm site will be adopted by farmer group members, and observed and adopted by other farmers in the beneficiary communities.

IR 1.1.2: Improved Smallholder Access to Agricultural Inputs

In order to provide support to the targeted vulnerable beneficiaries, the LAUNCH program disbursed 130 small grants in the form of starter agricultural kits to 130 farmer groups for a total value of \$45,590, averaging \$351 per farm group. The agricultural kits included inputs such as improved seeds (corn, rice & peanut), planting materials (cassava cuttings), vegetable (okra, cabbage, bitter balls, hot pepper, cucumber) and assorted farming tools (cutlasses, hoes, shovels, diggers and axes). The starter kits are a one-time provision to newly recruited farmer groups and are meant to 1) provide poor farmers with minimum planting materials to start their agricultural activities and 2) introduce farmers to the benefits of improved planting materials (seeds and cassava cuttings). LAUNCH expects that the starter kits will constitute an incentive for the newly recruited farmers to use improved planting materials (seeds & cassava cuttings).

Table 2: List and quantities of items distributed to new farmer groups in FY 2012.

No.	Farming Tools Items	Unit	Quantity
1	Cutlass	Pcs	1,565
2	Axe	Pcs	375
3	Regular	Pcs	530
4	Wheel barrow	Pcs	169
5	Shovel	Pcs	594
6	Bucket (Plastic)	Pcs	106
7	Measuring Tape-50M	Pcs	144
8	Digger	Pcs	222
9	Plastic twine	Rolls	363
10	Gardening Hoe	Pcs	66
11	Watering can	Pcs	396
12	Rain boots	Pairs	375

LAUNCH encourages farmers to multiply the provided seeds and cuttings for future use and/or sale to others to ensure that improved varieties will continue to be grown in target communities.

b) IR 1.2: Increased Rural Household Livelihood Opportunities

During FY 2012, the LAUNCH program enlisted the help of a volunteer to design its poultry program. The poultry component is intended to encourage targeted LAUNCH communities to diversify their diet and to start income generating activities through the introduction of improved poultry breeds at the community level. Early challenges included finding reliable and steady supply channels for required breeds and medicines. Liberia does not have a local supplier of improved breeds, therefore orders for these breeds must be imported from neighboring countries such as Ivory Coast. Additionally, because of lack of basic infrastructure in most rural areas to run a modern poultry operation, the program intends to promote semi-free range poultry. LAUNCH will work with communities to build poultry houses using local materials as part of their contribution to the program. The design of these poultry houses has already been developed and is being used by some NGOs in Liberia.

The poultry grants will primarily target Care group communities participating in SO2 activities, where LAUNCH agricultural activities do not exist, in an effort to promote integration and overlap of LAUNCH activities. A set of criteria including the Care group's record of regular meetings, home visits and willingness to build locally made poultry houses using the design promoted by LAUNCH, have been developed as the basis for the selection of participating communities. For pilot purposes, ten LAUNCH communities (one in Bong and one in Nimba) with active Care groups have been identified to receive the first poultry grants.

The livelihoods team has drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining responsibilities and contributions from the participating communities and has shared the MOU with community leaders for their input.

Sub-IR 1.2.1: Improved Market Linkages

LAUNCH Farming as a Business (FaaB) and Post Harvest Handling (PHH) specialists continued to conduct awareness meetings and trainings for LAUNCH farmers throughout FY 2012. The program has started to link second year farmers to established buyers in local markets. LAUNCH has also begun training youth groups in rural entrepreneurship so that they can provide much needed supply of improved seeds and tools to remote farming communities in Bong and Nimba.

Road Rehabilitation

During FY 2012, the LAUNCH program was not able to rehabilitate any feeder roads. After having submitted and received approval from the Ministry of Public Works and USAID to rehabilitate a 10 km road linking Zukarzue to Mao in Nimba County, the LAUNCH program was later notified by the Ministry that another partner received a higher level of funding to rehabilitate this road beyond the stretch proposed by the LAUNCH program. This setback led the LAUNCH program team to look for other feeder roads to rehabilitate. While no roads can be rehabilitated between March and October because of the rainy season, the LAUNCH program has identified and submitted an Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP) to USAID for a new road in Nimba (a 7.5 km road Gbalah–Rlantuo) and completed the assessment of another 11.1 km road in Bong (Boyermah Road). The LAUNCH team expects to complete the rehabilitation of both roads before the beginning of the 2013 rainy season.

Sub-IR 1.2.2: Improved Smallholder Access to Financial Resources

Farming as a Business (FaaB)

During FY 2012, LAUNCH's FaaB/Credit Specialists conducted thirty nine (39) training sessions on topics covering record keeping, savings & credits, group dynamics and group formation for a total of 308 (males-136; females-172) farmers. The purpose of the training was to explain to the communities the importance of FaaB and the formation of savings groups (Susu clubs). As a result of the sensitization and trainings, LAUNCH farmers were able to save a total of LD 486,425 (US\$6,948).

Farmer groups welcomed the initiative and pledged to fully cooperate and participate. Formal training in FaaB/Credit and Savings was on-going in Bong and Nimba Counties during the fiscal year. The Specialists also facilitated the drafting of farmer groups' bye-laws and constitution in the beneficiary communities.

Savings groups are self-capitalized and are used to provide communities with internal funds used to support a variety of community-based initiatives deemed of interest by community members. Savings generated by the communities may, for instance, be used for bulk purchasing of seeds and tools by a given farmer group to use in their block farm.

Post Harvest Handling (PHH) and Marketing

During FY 2012, LAUNCH field extension workers (FEWs) worked with select farmer groups in the areas of postharvest handling, food preservation, and packaging. Topics covered included threshing, traditional and improved methods of drying (solar drying), traditional and improved methods of storage, warehousing, food processing and fermentation. The training also covered seed collection and protection techniques to ensure seed viability for future use. A total of 1,328

farmers (656 males and 672 females) were trained by LAUNCH PHH specialists (see table 4 below). The PHH specialists also trained farmers in the construction of scaffolds, farm kitchens, seed storage, drying, sorting and packaging. Thus, 18 scaffolds and 12 kitchen/huts were built in FY 2012 using local materials.

Table 3: Number of farmers and groups trained in PHH during FY 2012

	No. FG	Male	Female	Total
Bong	43	439	418	857
Nimba	23	217	254	471
Total	66	656	672	1,328

As a means of building local capacity, a US-based volunteer on post-harvest technology visited the LAUNCH program and conducted an intensive field trip along with LAUNCH PHH specialists in both Bong and Nimba. At the end of the assignment, the volunteer designed and recommended locally made and affordable drying structures that can easily be adopted by LAUNCH communities. The PHH specialists have started rolling out the drying structures to LAUNCH communities in the field just following the end of FY 2012.

Finally, the PHH specialists supervised the harvest of the following crops by LAUNCH farmers. The supervision included advising the farmer on the right harvest time, methods of harvesting and assisting farmers in weighing their products. Please note that as many LAUNCH program farmers have not yet harvested their crops, the LAUNCH team anticipates increases in the quantities listed below following the harvest in early FY 2013.

Table 4: Quantity of crops produced by LAUNCH Farmer Groups

County	No. FGs Producers	Crop	Quantity (kg)
Bong	2	Cowpea	225
	2	Hot pepper	450
	2	Bitter ball	1,225
	1	Water melon	2,456
Nimba	3	Cassava	13,567
	2	Lowland rice	2,400
	4	Vegetables	4,742

SO2: Reduced Chronic Malnutrition of Vulnerable Women and Children under Five

LAUNCH addresses chronic malnutrition through two intermediate results: improved nutrition, feeding and care practices among pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children under two, as well as improved prevention and treatment of maternal and child illness through strengthening health clinics, community mobilization, and water and sanitation practices. In addition to providing food rations to 15,830 beneficiaries in FY 2012, LAUNCH strove to ensure all beneficiaries participated in corresponding behavior change activities and received requisite preventative health care services. Each month, new beneficiaries were registered while beneficiaries who reached 24 months of age graduated from the program. During FY 2012 the program averaged approximately 9,600 active beneficiaries per month. A total of 133 Care groups have been established, comprised of approximately 9,000 beneficiaries. Each of the approximately 900 lead mothers participating in Care groups are in turn responsible for groups of

approximately ten mothers (“mother groups”). The annual survey finding, that 85% of beneficiaries with active ration cards are participating in Care groups, is in line with project records documenting Care group participation.

IR2.1 Improved Nutrition, Feeding & Care Practices among Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW) & Children Under Two

During FY 2012, LAUNCH provided food rations to 4,591 PLW, reaching 79% of the target, and 11,239 children under two, reaching 126% of the target. A total of 15,830 cumulative beneficiaries have been reached, equivalent to 108% of the total target for FY 2012. More children than PLW are participating in SO2 activities. While it is expected that there will be more children than PLWs in the program, the gap between the two is larger than anticipated. LAUNCH will be investigating the reasons for the disparity and will adjust programming accordingly.

LAUNCH surpassed its beneficiary target due largely to improved community relations and registration processes. During FY 2012 the program invested in ensuring community support for food distribution points (FDPs) by establishing relationships with town chiefs and village leaders and signing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with community Food Management Committees (FMCs). Monthly food distributions occur at 17 FDPs in Bong and 23 in Nimba, where FMCs, community leaders, and LAUNCH staff are present to assist in operations. The LAUNCH team has also improved work planning to ensure communities receive notifications about FDP dates sufficiently in advance.

Beneficiary registration dramatically improved during FY 2012 with the transition to using mobile phone technology to register new beneficiaries. Improved data quality and data flow have resulted in reduced waiting time for beneficiaries and reduced complaints by beneficiaries, ultimately helping provide rations to more beneficiaries. Since March 2012, over 5,000 beneficiaries were registered by mobile phone; average wait time to receive their first rations is approximately four weeks. In addition, ongoing support from JSI on the commodities database has helped to ensure efficiencies in registration.

While beneficiaries are receiving supplemental food to improve their nutrition, results from the annual survey (a beneficiary-based survey conducted utilizing the Large Country - Lot Quality Assurance Sampling methodology) demonstrate that feeding and care practices are also improving among beneficiaries. According to the annual survey results, indicators for exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and proper food hygiene behaviors improved from the baseline and exceeded FY 2012 targets. The water storage behavior (68%) indicator was not achieved (actual result: 52% - refer to the indicator performance tracking table (IPTT) for specific data).

The positive results generally correspond to the topics that respondents reported learning about in the LAUNCH program through Care groups: breastfeeding and hygiene/hand washing were the most commonly reported topics, followed by complementary feeding, maternal nutrition/pregnancy care, and caring for sick children. With the roll-out of the water and sanitation component/messaging this coming year, the LAUNCH team expects water storage behaviors will improve.

IR 2.2 Improved Prevention and Treatment of Maternal and Child Illnesses

The annual survey results show improved vaccination rates, but there is a need for continued focus on prevention and treatment of maternal and child illnesses. The percentage of children fully vaccinated increased to 41%; 90% of these cases were verified with a child health record, whereas the remaining 10% were based on the mother's recall. Attendance of four or more antenatal care (ANC) visits during the last pregnancy had no change, remaining at 66%; 58% of these cases were validated with the mothers' health record. The percent of households reporting an outbreak of diarrhea in the past two weeks increased from baseline figures. It should be noted, however, that the survey took place at the height of the rainy season, when diarrhea outbreaks are more frequent.

LAUNCH has provided 10,000 new mother and child health cards to health clinics since September 2011. The cards are an essential part of LAUNCH's strategy to promote increased clinic visits. According to the annual survey, 89% of beneficiaries have a health record, either a new or old health card or a vaccination certificate.

IR2.2.1 Strengthened Clinic Response to Community Health Needs

With strong support from JSI, LAUNCH conducted Essential Nutrition Action (ENA) trainings for various participants during FY 2012. Specific topics covered during ENA trainings include: optimal breastfeeding practices; the importance of vitamin A and supplements; complementary feeding; the causes of malnutrition; the need for growth monitoring; feeding a sick child; and nutrition for women. During FY 2012, LAUNCH staff played an active role in monitoring the thirteen health clinics targeted by the program. LAUNCH M&E staff collected data on key indicators to monitor essential maternal and child health and nutrition services provided, such as ANC and growth monitoring and promotion (GMP). The LAUNCH team developed a partnership with the County Health Teams and clinic staff; data is regularly provided by six of seven clinics in Nimba, and five of six clinics in Bong, and the program is overcoming the obstacles to gathering data regularly in the remaining two clinics by more frequent visits to clinics by the M&E Staff. Data demonstrated that GMP increased in three clinics in Nimba and two clinics in Bong following the ENA Trainings for clinic staff conducted by LAUNCH in February 2012. However, GMP still needs improvement in most clinics and LAUNCH continues to emphasize the importance of GMP. The LAUNCH ENA Advisor makes supportive supervision visits specifically focused on GMP, and SO2 staff visit clinics weekly to encourage health talks, growth monitoring and the correct use of the health cards.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) strongly promotes their policy of encouraging women to deliver at MOHSW health facilities. However, due to limited transport services and women frequently living long distances from clinics, facilities are needed at the clinics to provide overnight accommodation for women before and after delivery. In support of this plan, LAUNCH has collaborated with the MOHSW and communities to construct maternal waiting homes. The construction of these homes began during FY 2012 in two clinics in Bong and one clinic in Nimba. Repairs were also made to female bathrooms. It is expected that all construction in the selected clinics will be completed by the end of November 2012.

During FY 2012 LAUNCH determined that training of clinic staff on community management of acute malnutrition was not warranted at this time. Data from the most recent population-based anthropometric survey in Bong and Nimba: "The State of Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Liberia", conducted by the MoHSW and the World Food Program in late 2010, did not detect

any severe acute malnutrition in the area. The program will continue to monitor the situation and will adjust if there is an increase in acute malnutrition.

IR2.2.2 Improved Community Mobilization for Health

There are currently 133 Care groups formed within the four districts of Nimba and the two districts of Bong. During FY 2012 LAUNCH SO2 staff worked on establishing Care groups, supporting their performance, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of gCHVs and LAUNCH staff in the implementation of Care groups.

During FY 2012 several measures were also taken to ensure quality improvement of the Care groups. The SO2 team finalized the first four modules of the Care group curriculum and developed a schedule of the modules to be taught to lead mothers. LAUNCH staff are also now held responsible for leading all Care group meetings to ensure the lessons are properly taught to lead mothers, acting as the Health Promoters of the traditional Care group structure. The gCHVs are currently working alongside LAUNCH staff to mobilize their Lead Mothers and learn how to teach and manage Care groups so they can eventually fill the role of Health Promoter. Additionally, registries for tracking attendance and basic vital statistics of beneficiaries participating in Care groups have been finalized and a standardized Quality Improvement Verification Checklist (QIVC) has been introduced to LAUNCH staff.

The annual survey found that the majority of SO2 beneficiaries are actively involved in LAUNCH Care groups. Eighty-one percent of lead mothers surveyed met in a group session with their Care group in the past two weeks, and 79% of household mothers surveyed met within the past two weeks. Seventy-nine percent of household mothers also reported receiving a home visit from their lead mother in the past two weeks. Furthermore the annual survey found 8% of participants in Care groups were no longer in the ration portion of the program. These data, in addition to the very positive anecdotal data gathered by LAUNCH staff regarding Care groups, have shown the value that women place in the Care groups and bode well for the sustainability of the groups after the LAUNCH program ends.

LAUNCH staff work with Community Health Committees (CHC) to mobilize communities where Care groups are implemented and food rations are provided. Per the Government of Liberia's Community Health Policy, one CHC exists per community and is comprised of five to nine members. CHCs are responsible for electing leadership as well as nominating a representative to the Community Health Development Committee (CHDC). The CHDC serves as the governing body of all CHCs in the catchment community and is well connected with the health facility in the catchment area. In September 2012, LAUNCH led a three-day orientation training of 50 CHDC members in Bong County, in collaboration with the Bong County Health Team. The training oriented CHDCs on their roles and responsibilities and reinforced CHDC linkages to health facilities. The same training will take place in Nimba in FY 2013. The development and training of CHDCs is expected to improve the link from communities to health facilities, as each community now has a designated representative to relay community concerns to the facility staff. As these committees are meant to be permanent community structures, they are essential for the sustainability of LAUNCH interventions. Following the recent solidification of the community level health structure according to MoHSW strategies and guidelines (clinics, CHDC, CHC, gCHV, Care groups), LAUNCH will move its focus to additional technical trainings for the gCHVs including community integrated management of childhood illness.

Four separate “mini grant” proposals were developed and approved by USAID to support SO2 and SO3 activities in FY 2012. These proposals included the:

- provision of environmentally safe stoves to the best performing lead mothers;
- organization of an education component focused on literacy for lead mothers and their family members;
- purchase and distribution of 2,250 school desks, 240 blackboards, and learning kits to 32 targeted primary schools; and
- implementation of water and sanitation activities focused on community-led repair, rehabilitation, installation and/or construction of water pumps. Please see additional details on LAUNCH water and sanitation activities directly below.

IR2.3 Improved Water & Sanitation Practices

In preparation for fully implementing the water and sanitation component of the program in FY13, a community level assessment took place during the past year, as did the recruitment and hiring of staff. The assessment indicated that 50% of existing wells in the area of implementation were operational. A total of six staff have been hired and MOUs have been signed in the first twelve communities to be targeted for water and sanitation activities. Water committees have also been established as sub-committees of the CHCs and requisite training is taking place. The staff has also worked to coordinate with government and non-governmental partners involved in water and sanitation. To date, the activities have only taken place in Bong, they will be expanded to Nimba County in FY 2013.

SO 3: Improved Education Opportunities for Children and Youth

LAUNCH staff directly support 32 primary schools and collaborate with the schools, communities, teachers, school principals and parent teacher associations (PTAs) to promote improvements in quality education. LAUNCH’s role is to encourage and support the efforts of PTAs through guidance and suggestions; financial or in-kind assistance is not provided until the community projects are well underway.

IR3.1 Improved Quality of Primary School and Livelihoods-based Education for Youth

SO3’s four education coordinators have identified five priority interventions for the 32 targeted schools. The first intervention is to support the school and community’s own self-help activities to upgrade educational environments, such as the construction of new classrooms or latrine repair. The second intervention area focuses on organizing training opportunities for teachers and PTA members. Teacher training is usually led by a peer teacher who has mastered a particular activity. Thirdly, LAUNCH’s education coordinators train PTA members on their roles and responsibilities. Throughout FY 2012, each of the 32 schools had at least four PTA-focused trainings. The fourth intervention area involves the provision of basic materials to the schools. The fifth focused intervention for SO3’s education coordinators is to work with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to support early childhood education. LAUNCH education coordinators organized training in collaboration with MOE staff for 96 pre-school teachers from Bong and Nimba Counties during FY 2012. The education coordinators have also supported at least four training sessions in early child development for teachers at each school, and will soon provide student learning aids for each classroom. During FY 2012, PCI also provided each school with a complete curriculum for grades 1-6.

IR3.2 Improved Management of Schools/Education Program

In FY 2012 the education team introduced a questionnaire to all 32 schools designed to generate dialogue and planning among principals to jointly address identified weaknesses in school management procedures. For example, efforts have been made to improve record keeping in the schools. LAUNCH provided two ledgers to each school to be used by staff and principals to record teacher attendance and student grades. PTAs are also becoming more involved in school management. The PTA at the Moipata Public School, for example, located in Salala District has begun to take part in school administrator meetings and are requesting that students' grades be made available at the end of every semester to allow parents to track child performance.

Cross-Cutting: Disaster Risk Reduction and Early Warning Systems

Disaster risk reduction is a cross-cutting component within the LAUNCH program and has gained momentum during the past 12 months. Activities included engagement with the national level government counterparts on their new disaster reduction strategy and possible means for the LAUNCH program to collaborate. These meetings included donors and UN agencies. The government priority at present is to create an autonomous agency for disaster management. A draft Act for the establishment of the agency and a disaster management policy has been crafted and is pending legislative approval. LAUNCH is currently part of the Disaster Risk Management Technical Committee, and is one of the stakeholders reviewing the Policy and the Act for submission to the National Legislature.

At the County level LAUNCH is implementing DRR activities in Bong County, where two staff are dedicated to the implementation of the DRR component. The DRR team earlier this year completed an assessment of all LAUNCH communities in Bong and through this assessment identified the most vulnerable communities that were in need of assistance. The Bong DRR team is currently providing support, tools and training to 18 of the most vulnerable communities. In these communities, the LAUNCH team works in collaboration with the Community Health Committees (CHC) and Government Community Health Volunteers (GCHVs). Together the communities and the LAUNCH team have relocated trash disposal sites to more appropriate locations, covered abandoned wells and cleaned up contaminated water sites. All of these activities were identified as priorities by the community leaders, CHC members and other community participants. These activities were selected because they could be managed independently by the communities, were low cost interventions and all contributed to enriching health conditions within the communities.

The DRR strategy and future priorities will be re-visited by a technical consultant from PCI's Head Quarters to determine how impact can be improved and coverage expanded.

Cross-cutting: Social Behavioral Change Strategy

In May, an international consultant assisted LAUNCH in the development of an integrated social and behavioral change (SBC) strategy across all program objectives. A multi-disciplinary team used a participatory process to: define behaviors and target groups; conduct qualitative research; develop messages; and define materials, channels and activities to formulate the strategy. The purpose of the SBC strategy is to create a supportive environment by increasing the involvement and awareness of groups that influence behaviors such as village chiefs, women, youth groups and religious leaders. The results of the exercise were shared with the majority of LAUNCH

staff. At present, LAUNCH team is developing a detailed implementation plan that will help to guide the implementation of SBC activities by LAUNCH field offices.

II. SUCCESS STORY

LAUNCH mobile phone registration reduces wait time for beneficiaries to receive rations

In order to better reach project beneficiaries, JSI has implemented an electronic data collection system at LAUNCH food distribution points (FDPs) designed to streamline the beneficiary registration process and collect nutrition/health monitoring information efficiently and cost effectively. In March 2012, LAUNCH started using EpiSurveyor mobile, a mobile application designed by DataDyne that facilitates transfer of data through pre-set forms on smart phones and enables transmission of data from the phones directly to the internet for immediate view and use. Previously, the process to register LAUNCH beneficiaries for receiving food rations was paper based, facing challenges of lost forms, data entry, and low supervision. LAUNCH field staff are now using mobile phones to enter and upload beneficiary registration information, providing the Monrovia-based commodity team with immediate real time access to the data that is subsequently merged into the Commodity Database of beneficiaries.

The use of mobile phones dramatically decreased the time between beneficiary registration and the receipt of their first food ration. Early trends also show a high coverage of beneficiary registered. In addition, the commodity team has found that the reduction of paperwork and data handling of data by multiple people has impacted the entire supply system, making the food distribution process more efficient. The mobile system has also allowed the Monrovia-based supervisors to better track and monitor field staffs' job performance.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

The following are lessons learned on the LAUNCH program during FY 2012:

- Supportive supervision and capacity building of LAUNCH staff have been identified as high priorities. The number and intensity of site monitoring visits has increased substantially to ensure the sites of all staff were routinely visited, by the technical coordinator and field Team Leaders. Also, the LAUNCH management team organized an all-staff retreat held during September to, among other objectives, help build staff capacity, team cohesion and to provide staff with a broader sense of the program and their role within the larger team.
- The LAUNCH team recognizes Care groups as an excellent entry point for new interventions such as literacy, saving groups, and poultry activities.
- Growth monitoring is not regularly done at the health facilities in Bong and Nimba counties. To address this, LAUNCH staff visit health clinics more frequently in an effort to encourage growth monitoring. LAUNCH discussed the issue with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) and initiated greater collaboration with the USAID-funded Rebuilding Basic Health Services (RBHS) program implemented by JSI. LAUNCH expects that more formal support from the County Health Teams who directly supervise clinic staff will improve the situation.